



A LETTER FROM HOME

THE MERIDIAN STAR

SPORTS & RECREATION

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How a salute changed her world

Morgan Boothe is an English instructor at Meridian Community College. She is married to Glenn Boothe, assistant football coach at Northeast Lauderdale High School.

It was that connection which brought Morgan to Trojan Field one night during the football season. And, it was fate that brought her father, U.S. Army veteran Cecil Ray Morrison, and some Marines from Naval Air Station Meridian together on that same night.



Boothe

Morgan witnessed an event that changed her life, a moment of transformation during which she discovered her father is more than he appears to be — and always has been. Those three seconds in her life also changed the way she sees the active-duty military: "... never again will I not notice the servicemen standing nearby."

By Morgan Boothe
special to The Star

It's 1965. On a dark night in the

Vietnam jungle, my dad flung himself from a helicopter, landing in the middle of heavy fire.

As he fought for his life and the lives of his fellow Green Berets, he was certainly not thinking of his life beyond that moment, beyond that battle, or even beyond that war.

Having been wounded in combat before this night, surely his life must have flashed before his eyes. Surely, in the seconds it took him to fall to the ground, he remembered his family, his hometown and probably his past life.

It's 2004. On a dark night at a Northeast Lauderdale High School football game, my perception of my dad and the military — especially Naval Air Station Meridian — changed forever.

Because my mom married my dad after he retired from the military, and because I was 10 when they married, I never knew much about his life in the armed services. As I got older, I realized he didn't care to relive those traumatic days, so I never asked many questions.

I've never known my dad as a Green Beret who was awarded numerous medals for bravery and years of service. I've always just known him as "Dad." Even though he was not my biological father, my real father passed away when I was 6, this man was unfailingly generous with everything he owned. He always had a smile, and he always went the extra mile to make sure his daughter was happy.

This night, my parents drove the 150 miles to see the Northeast Trojans take the field.

Walking across that dark parking lot toward the brightly lit stadium, I scarcely noticed the young men from the Naval air station who helped park cars and control traffic at all the football games.

However, as we neared the men standing at the edge of the lot, they suddenly sprang to attention, saluted smartly and said, "Hello, sir."

I gazed at them in amazement. Then I heard my dad say behind me, "Hello, gentlemen."

I realized that he was wearing his ... That act moved me nearly to tears

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

"HELLO, SIR"

This photograph recreates the moment when U.S. Marines from Naval Air Station Meridian saluted Sgt. Maj. Cecil Ray Morrison, U.S. Army retired, right, at a Northeast Lauderdale High School football game. U.S. Marines shown participating in the recreation are, left to right, Pfc. Omar Forbes, Pfc. Carlos Santiago, Pfc. Dean Manglona and Pfc. Muhammad Zghari. The Marines are members of Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron 1 and volunteer to help with parking at football games through an agreement with the Northeast NJROTC program.

Key Field: Home of the 238th ASOS, 248th ATCS

By Steve Gillespie
staff writer

The 238th Air Support Operations Squadron of the Mississippi Air National Guard is a tenant unit at Key Field in Meridian.

The mission of the 238th is to provide liaison and expertise to Army combat units on aerospace force applications. The unit's mission focuses on close air support and other missions, including surveillance and reconnaissance, airlift, electronic warfare and special operations.

The 238th also is tasked with the mission of deploying alongside Army ground forces to advise and assist the commander in the use of Air Force close air support, tactical

airlift and reconnaissance aircraft.

The 238th Airways and Air Communications Service Flight, Mobile was organized on Nov. 1, 1953. The organization later became the 238th Combat Communications Squadron and currently exists as the 238th ASOS.

The 238th is aligned with the following Army units: the 35th Infantry Division of the Kansas Army National Guard, Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.; the 39th Separate Infantry Brigade of the Arkansas Army National Guard, Little Rock, Ark.; and the 155th Separate Armor Brigade of the Mississippi Army National Guard, Tupelo.

The 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron

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FILE PHOTO

HOMECOMING

On June 14, 2004, members of the 238th Air Support Operations Squadron returned from Iraq. Staff Sgt. Don "Tyler" Wiggins is shown at the homecoming with his daughters, Kylie Anne, left, and Dixie Leah. Wiggins is on his way back to Iraq.

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